



Our busy October



Bike tour! Live band! Annual gala! Night at the Archives!

We've got a *lot* planned for this coming month:



Pedal to Pioneers Park (Oct. 14)

Grab your bike and your helmet—it's time for another History Bike Tour! Experience the art and history of Pioneers Park on this casual ten-mile group ride led by Lincoln Historic Preservation Planner Ed Zimmer. [Read more.](#)

After Hours: Rock, Stock & Swing (Oct. 19)

Make your night out a night in at the Nebraska History Museum! Explore Nebraska history while enjoying food and drink from local businesses and listening to a live band. Plus, history trivia, a prize raffle, a rockabilly themed costume contest, and other fun activities. [Read more.](#)





2018 Annual Gala (Oct. 25)

We invite you to salute the First Edition of History and recognize Nebraska's newspapers. Join us 6-8 pm at the Omaha World-Herald Freedom Center for a hearty cocktail buffet and awards presentation for our honored guests, including the man of honor John Gottschalk. [Read more.](#)

Night at the Archives (Oct. 25)

Most of our collections sit outside of public view in special storage spaces. On October 25, we're throwing open the doors for a series of archives tours. [Read more.](#)



And more!

Free Family Fun Day Oct. 6, and our Brown Bag Lecture Series continues with "[Mexican-American Family Stories](#)" on Oct. 18. And, as we told you in the previous issue, Sept. 29-30 is the big weekend for archeology

at Fort Robinson. See our [events calendar](#) for details.



Husker football got you down? Even Tom Osborne thought about quitting after this [crushing defeat](#). He decided to stick around and learn from it instead.



How pioneer trails shaped Omaha streets

In 1857 it was a day's journey from Omaha City to the Elkhorn River, and pioneer trails radiated outward from the frontier town. We've combined original survey maps with present-day streets to show where these early roads were. It's part of a new Nebraska History article about the origins of Military Avenue. It really was a military road, and before that it was the "Mormon Road to Utah."

[Keep reading.](#)



George Norris's snarky letter to an auto dealer

President Franklin Roosevelt later described the Nebraska senator as a "very perfect, gentle knight." This was true, apparently, even when Norris was sold a lemon. Rather than write an openly angry letter, in 1919 Norris made his point with some funny and biting sarcasm. [Keep reading.](#)



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(Formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society)

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1500 R Street, Lincoln, NE 68508-1651

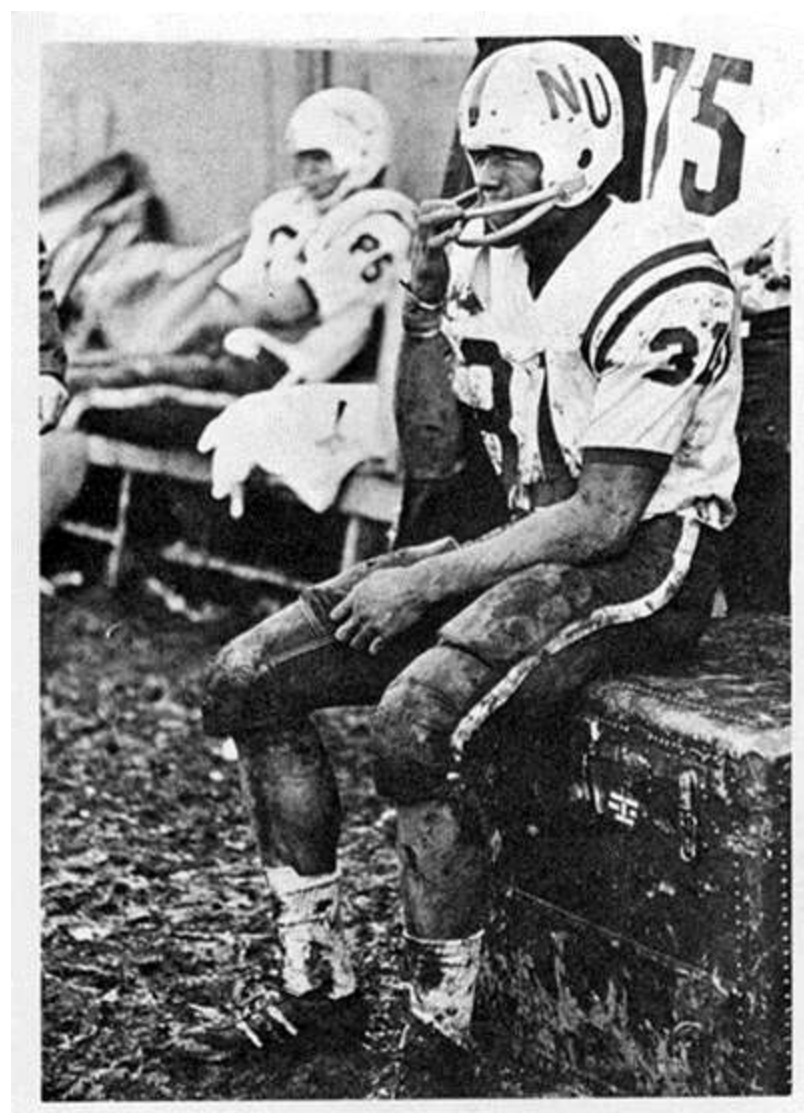
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Complete articles:

Tom Osborne thought about quitting after this crushing defeat

September 28, 2018



With the Husker football team 0-3 for the first time since 1945, this is a good time to remember when young Tom Osborne thought about hanging it up.

The year was 1968, and Nebraska had ended a disappointing 6-4 season with a 47-0 blowout loss at Oklahoma.

“I seriously considered resigning as a [Coach Bob] Devaney assistant after that game,” Osborne recalled.

He told the story during a November 28, 1973, speech at the Livestock Exchange Building in Omaha. Five days earlier, Osborne had ended his first season as head coach with another shutout loss in Norman, Oklahoma. This time the Sooners only won 27-0.

Otherwise the 1973 season was pretty good. The Huskers were 8-2-1, ranked #12 in the country, and were bound for the Cotton Bowl, where they would defeat #8 Texas on January 1, 1974. Osborne had inherited a good staff and well-stocked team from retiring head coach Bob Devaney.

Still, the recent loss to the Sooners stung, and Osborne was apparently making a point by bringing up the even worse loss in 1968.

“You can learn more in defeat than in victory if you will correct your mistakes,” he said.

The November speech wasn’t the first time Osborne had pointed to the ’68 Oklahoma game as a lesson. In February 1973 he had addressed a Fellowship of Christian Athletes banquet at Omaha’s Peony Park. With his first season as head coach still months away, he was greeted with a standing ovation.

“I wish you wouldn’t do that to me,” he said. “I haven’t won a single game yet.”

According to the *Omaha World-Herald*’s report, Osborne “cited Nebraska’s 47-0 loss at Oklahoma in 1968 as its most important game in recent years. After it he said the N.U. coaches ‘reevaluated our recruiting program and changed our offense and defense.’ From those changes, he said the Huskers’ national championships were built.”

As for the glorious 1970 and 1971 seasons, Osborne said winning a national championship “is nice, but you can’t build a life around it.” It’s never quite the thrill you expect.

“But that doesn’t mean we’re going to quit trying for them,” he added.

The Nice Guy's First Game



Probably almost as important to Tom Osborne as that first victory as Nebraska's new head coach were the congratulations he received after the game from Athletic Director Bob Devaney, the man who hand-picked him for the job. Other photos show him coming onto the field, a tense moment with assistant John Melton, and afterwards with wife Nancy and Anne and Suzi.



18

Sunday World-Herald Magazine of the Midlands, October 14, 1973

Above: Omaha World-Herald Magazine of the Midlands, Oct. 14, 1973.

Top: Unlabeled photo from 1968 football season from '69 Cornhusker (U. of Nebraska yearbook), p. 275.

—David L. Bristow, Editor

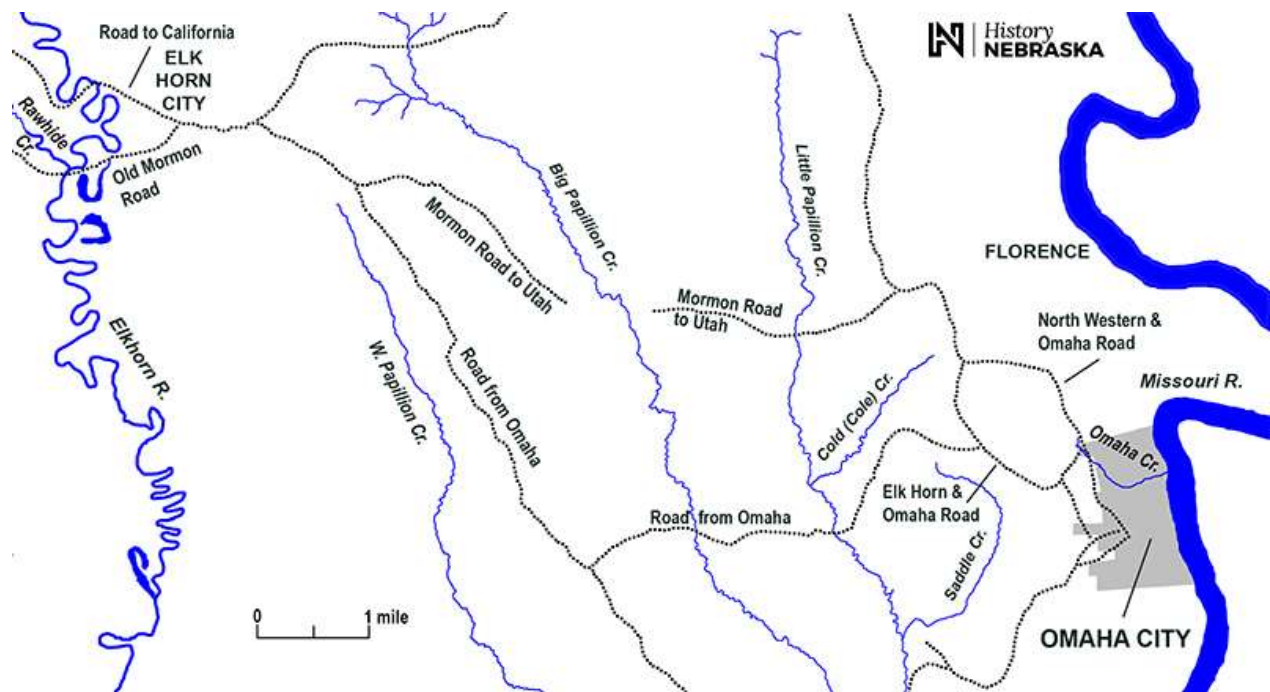
Sources:

Steve Sinclair, “Osborne: Title Not Thrill Expected,” *Omaha World-Herald*, Feb. 26, 1973.

Maurice Shadle, “Osborne Once Considered Quitting,” *Omaha World-Herald*, Nov. 29, 1973.

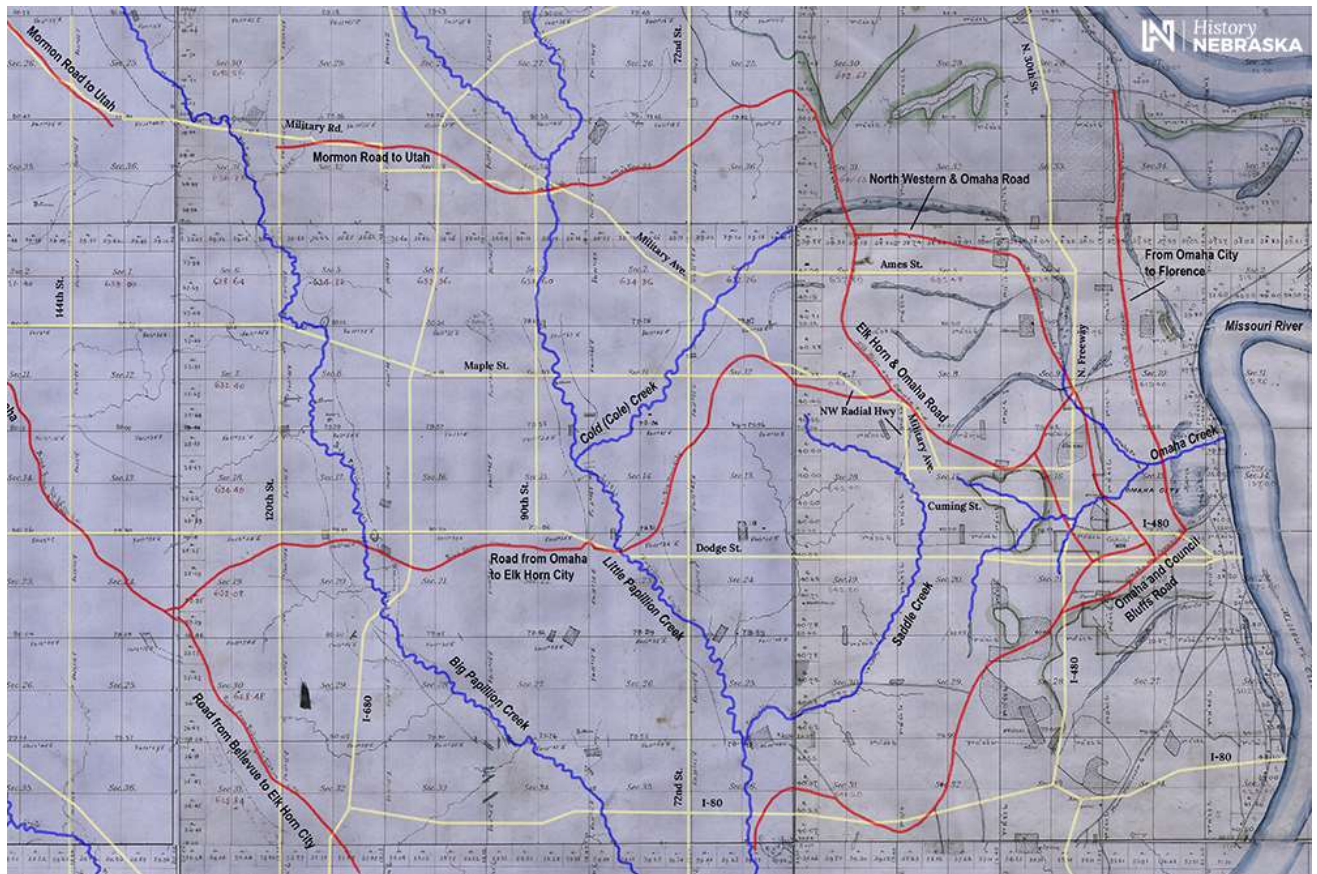
How pioneer trails shaped Omaha streets

September 28, 2018



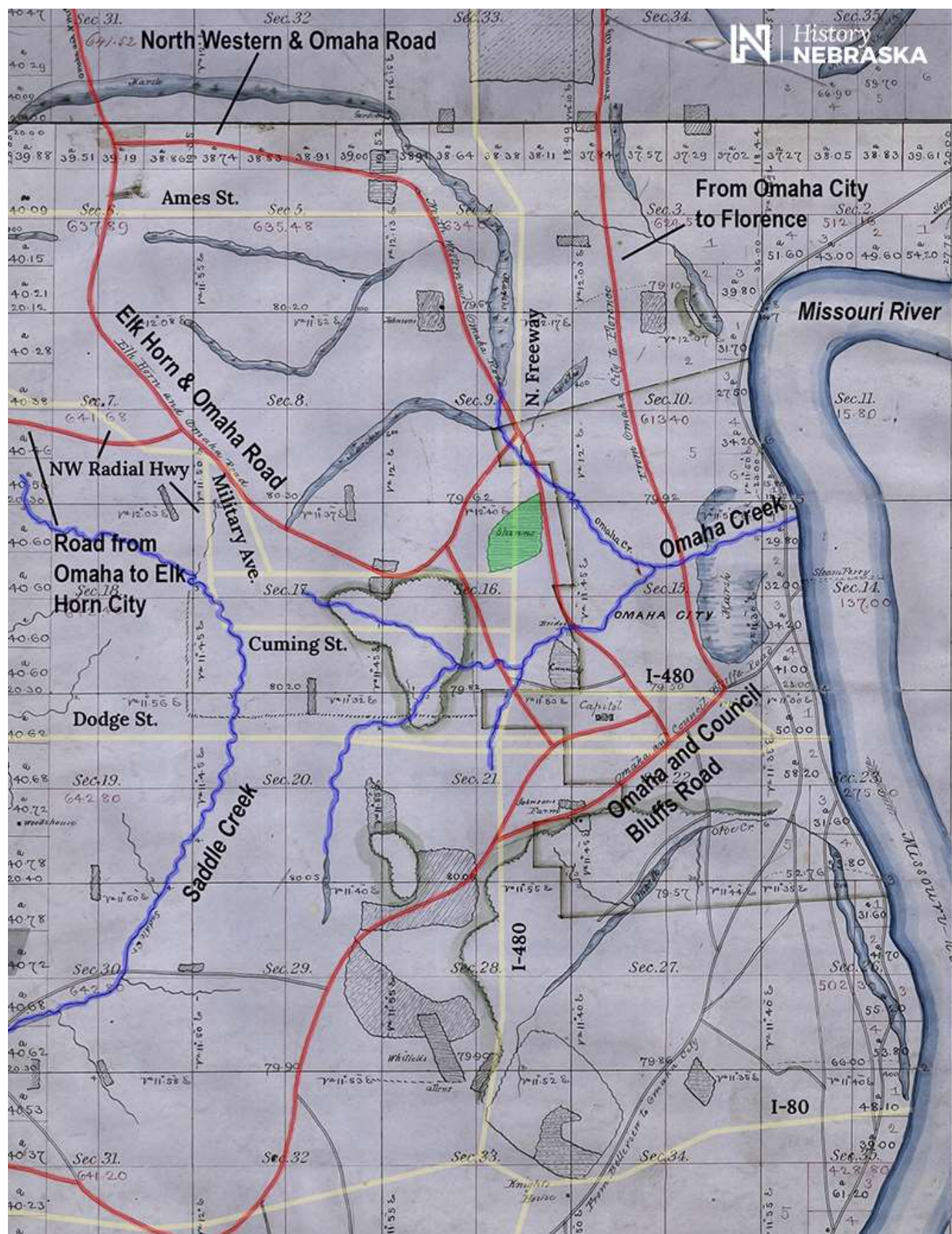
In 1857 it was a day’s journey from Omaha City to the Elkhorn River, and pioneer trails radiated outward from the frontier town. We’ve combined original survey maps with present-day streets to show where these early roads were. It’s part of a new *Nebraska History* article about the origins of Military Avenue. It really was a military road, and before that it was the “Mormon Road to Utah.”

Consider this 1857 survey map below. We've stitched together map images from the [Nebraska State Surveyor's Office](#), adding highlights and labels (in bold type) of selected features: 1857 roads in red; waterways in blue; present-day streets and highways in yellow.



This is a detail of the map that appears in *Nebraska History*, with present-day 144th Street on the left and the Missouri River on the right.

Where is Omaha? The boundaries of “Omaha City,” as it was then known, are marked to the right of the present North Freeway and I-480. It’s easier to see in this detail:



The neat grid of survey lines (in black) divide the land into quarter sections of 160 acres each. Four squares comprise a 640-acre section equal to a square mile. As you can see, many of today's main thoroughfares follow those old section lines marked by the 1857 surveyors.

Those surveyors were thinking mostly in terms of land claims and farms, not roads. The few farms are marked with little cross-hatched boxes. Most of the land was prairie. Omaha, in the earliest known photo of the city, looked like this:



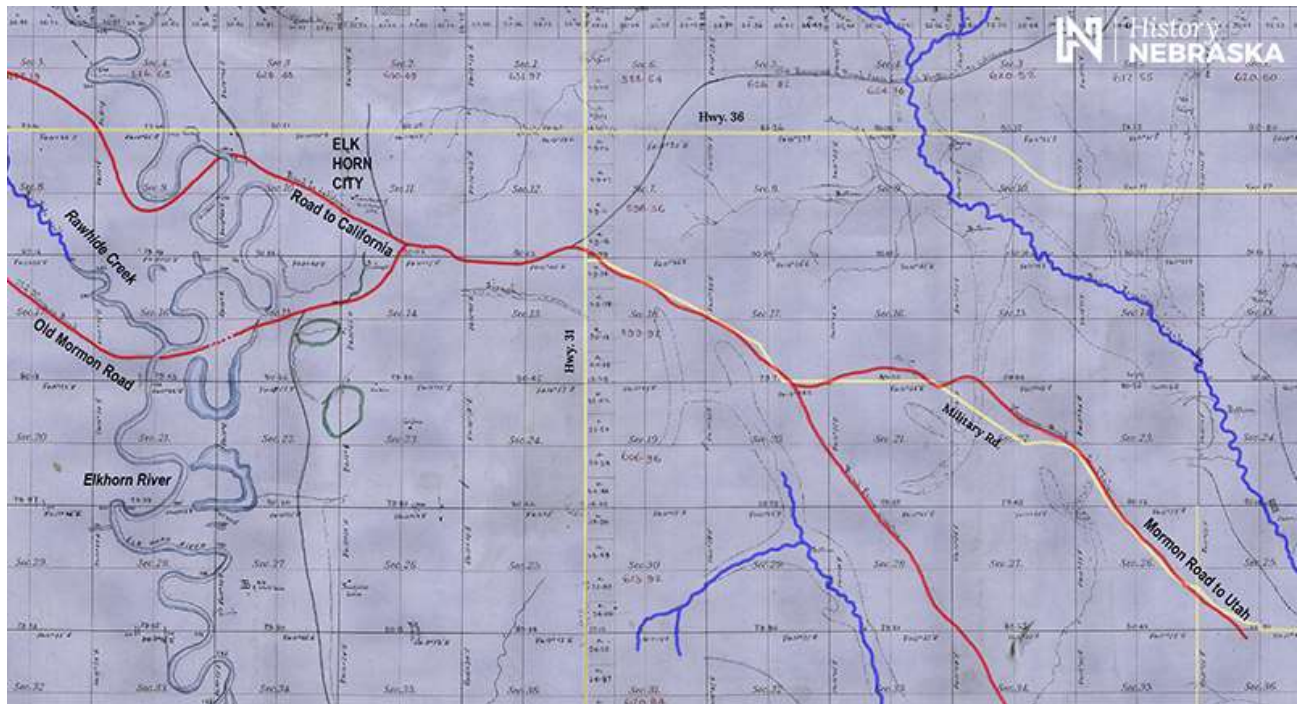
The view here is from a road leading into town from the south. The Missouri River is in the background, and the large building at right is the Herndon House, an early hotel built in 1858 at Ninth and Farnam. (photo number: RG2341-3-a)

As for roads, they followed the lay of the land, and aimed for spots where it was easiest to ford the creeks. No bridges were yet built.

Look at the big map again. See that place where Dodge Street jogs north and becomes West Dodge Road? It does so at the spot where the old Road from Omaha to Elk Horn City (today's Elk City, not Elkhorn) used to cross the Little Papio. By the time Dodge was graded west from the creek, it was easier to follow the section line.

And Military Avenue? For much of its route, it follows the old "Mormon Road to Utah," which dates to 1847. The US Army later improved the trail and built bridges to better supply Fort Kearny—that's why people started calling it "Military Road." Below is another section of the highlighted 1857 map, indicating 144th Street on the right and Highway 31 in the center. Notice how today's Military Avenue follows the old Mormon Road to Utah through west Omaha. "Elk

Horn City" is present-day Elk City, not Elkhorn (which wasn't founded yet). Near Elk Horn City was a ferry across the Elkhorn River.



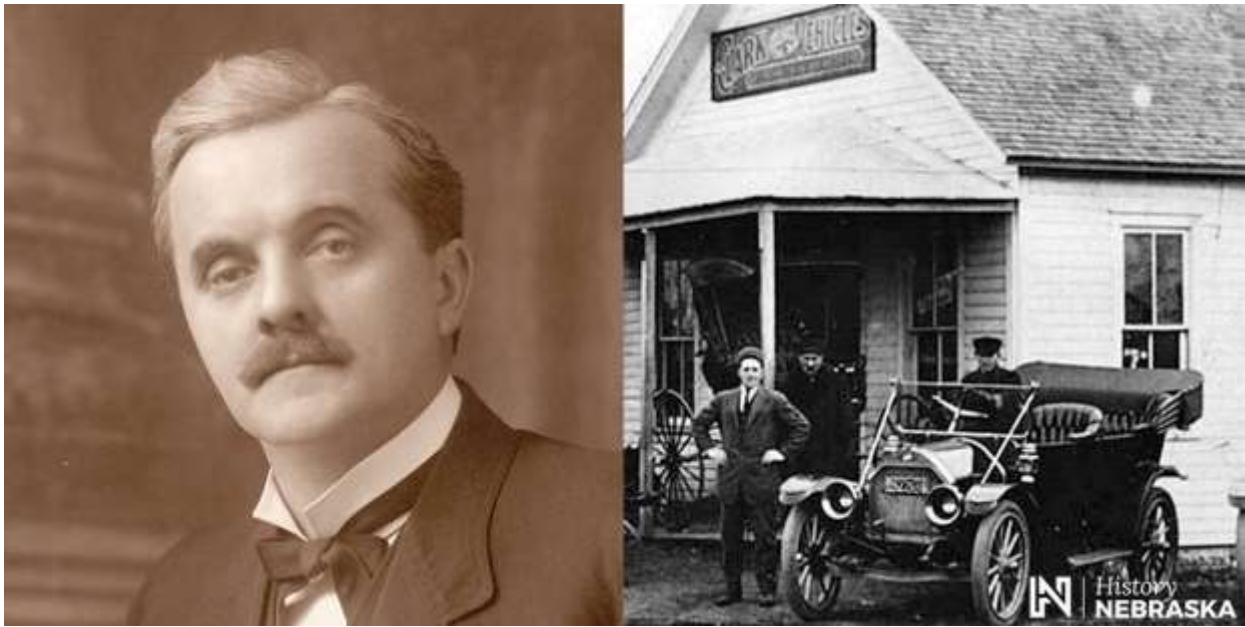
All this is told (with more maps and photos) in “Over Hill, Over Dale: A Nineteenth Century Biography of Omaha’s Military Road Network,” by Jo Wetherilt Behrens (of University of Nebraska-Omaha) in the Fall 2018 issue of [Nebraska History](#).

History Nebraska [members](#) receive *Nebraska History*; individual copies are available via the [Nebraska History Museum](#).

—David L. Bristow, Editor

Senator George Norris’s snarky letter to an auto dealer

September 28, 2018



George W. Norris of McCook (1861-1944) is remembered as one of the most influential US senators in American history, a dignified, idealistic leader that President Franklin Roosevelt once called “the very perfect, gentle knight of American progressive ideals.”

But this “perfect, gentle knight” could lay down some biting sarcasm when he felt he’d been sold a lemon. Sometime in the mid-1910s, Norris bought an Overland automobile, a popular brand in those days. By today's standards, even the best cars of the 1910s would be considered unreliable, underpowered clunkers. Drivers of the era expected breakdowns and frequent repairs. It was simply part of being an "automobilist." Norris was disappointed even by those standards.

On November 25, 1919, he wrote to the Harper Overland Company of Washington, D.C.:

Gentlemen: I have been very much interested in the extensive advertising campaign that you have been making of your new Overland Four, and I desire to suggest to you that in connection with this car which your advertising says has made such a record, that you advertise the car you sold me three or four years ago. . . .

It has run about three thousand miles. It has hardly been off of the pavement—but you would not need to say all this in the advertisement. You might say it has made its record over some rough roads, without saying anything about the fact that it has not been taken out of the District with one or two exceptions. The facts are, I have always been afraid to take it very far from home for fear I could not get back with it. A careful estimate of the expense I have been to for repairs, will show that it has cost just about a dollar a mile. The mileage of course, is small for the length of time I have had it, but this is explained by the fact that it has been in the repair shop most of the time.

In fact, I have had it nearly all rebuilt. It is a better car now than it was when I bought it, because while you represented to me that it had only run one hundred and seventy miles when I bought it, it would be easy to demonstrate that it had run a great many more than that and was practically worn out when you sold it to me for a new car but now, since it is rebuilt, I have hopes that it will eventually be of some service to me.

In a condensed way we could put all this on a bulletin board and hang it on the car, and put my car right by the side of the one you are now advertising in your show rooms. The facts are, my car looks better than the one you have there. It is a fine looker. It has never been used enough to wear off the gloss.

At the present time, it is not running. In a moment of enthusiasm, I induced my neighbor to come over this morning and help push it down the hill, with the hope that it would start by the time we got to the bottom. In this we failed, and it is standing now at the foot of the hill, so if you exhibited it you would have to go to the expense of getting a truck to haul it to your place of business. I will be glad to cooperate with you in any advertising plan that you may suggest in regard to my car, providing you confine yourselves within reasonable limits, to the truth. Very truly yours, G. W. Norris.



Above: Overland auto dealership, probably near Friend, Nebraska, 1912. *History Nebraska* RG3021-8-6

Top: Detail of portrait of US Senator George W. Norris. *History Nebraska* RG3298-1-170